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ADDRESSED TO THE

BRANCHES AND AID SOCIETIES

TRIBUTARY TO THE

U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION.

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MAY 15, 1865.

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## U. S. Sanitary Commission,

CENTRAL OFFICE,

WASHINGTON, D. C., *May* 15, 1865.

TO THE BRANCHES AND SOLDIERS' AID SOCIETIES TRIBUTARY  
TO THE UNITED STATES SANITARY COMMISSION :

At the late quarterly session of the Board of the U. S. Sanitary Commission, held at Washington, April 18-21, the President and General Secretary were requested to prepare an address to the various Branches and Aid Societies co-operating with the Commission, and awaiting instructions from the Commission as to their present and future duty.

Since that period such rapid changes have occurred in the military situation, affecting so materially the work of the Commission, that it has been impossible, until now, to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to the probable demands to be made upon us.

While our work in the field is rapidly drawing to a close, there remains much to be done by the Commission within the approaching two months for the relief and comfort of our armies as they return from their long marches and exhausting service. New depots of supplies have already been established at the several points where these armies are to rendezvous and encamp preparatory to their discharge.

The abandonment of the Post and Base Hospitals must increase for the time the already large number of patients in General Hospital, while the necessary aid to be extended

to the various garrisons during the interval preceding the more permanent adjustment of the new military status must make large drafts upon our resources. The supplies now available at our several depots are wholly insufficient to meet this final but urgent demand upon the Supply Service; and, deeming it important both for the actual relief of existing needs and for the consistent completion of this work of the people, continued now through four successive years of faithful co-operation, that our issues be not meagre or our care neglectful, we call upon our Branches and Aid Societies to maintain their usual system and activity up to the 4th July next, persevering in their work until that time with unabated energy, and with an intelligent appreciation of the necessity of the case.

It is confidently anticipated that their labors in contributing supplies to the hospitals and the field may properly terminate at that date, unless wholly improbable and unexpected events arise to make such conclusion of their work unpatriotic and inhumane. Timely notice will be given if any such necessity occur.

In the meantime the rapid disbanding of our armies and their immediate return to their relations in civil life will devolve upon our Branches and Aid Societies a new and important work, to be performed under their immediate supervision, and necessitating the maintenance of their organization for an indefinite period. The occasion for this continued effort grows out of the fact that these returning soldiers, by their military service, have become more or less detached from their previous relations, associations, and pursuits, which are now to be re-established. Many of these men will be not only physically but morally disabled, and will exhibit the injurious effects of camp life in a weakened power of self-guidance and self-restraint, inducing a certain kind of indolence, and, for the time, indisposition to take hold of hard work. The possession of money



in the majority of cases will increase the inducements to idleness and dissipation, as well as the exposure to imposition. To protect the soldier from these evils and temptations, naturally resulting from his previous military life, is a duty which is now owed to him by the people, as much as was the care extended to him, through the Commission, while in active service in the field; for we are to regard the future necessity that may exist for help and guidance to returned soldiers as no less a condition incident to the war than the wounds and sickness to which the supply agencies of the Commission have hitherto so generously ministered.

In submitting to our Aid Societies a practical plan of work adapted to these new conditions, our object is to suggest such methods as will aid the process by which these men are to resume their natural and proper relations in civil life.

The first and most important means in the accomplishment of this object will be found in a systematic provision for securing suitable occupation to all these returned men, adapted, where necessary, to the condition of those partially disabled, thus constituting each Branch and Aid Society a "Bureau of Information and Employment," by which the light occupations in all towns, and whatever work can be as well done by invalid soldiers as by others, shall be religiously given to the men who may have incapacitated themselves for rivalry in more active and laborious fields of duty by giving their limbs, their health, and their blood to the nation.

To this end, and to guard against the possibility of imposition, the names of all men who have enlisted from each town and city should be obtained and preserved, and a record kept that shall gather all facts material to the work in hand; which, while it will be the means of collecting most useful information, will, at the same time, constitute an invaluable contribution to the his-

tory of the war. Carefully prepared forms for this purpose will be furnished from the Central Office of the Commission, to which monthly returns will be made, and where they will be duly tabulated. These results will be promptly transmitted each month to the several Aid Societies, to furnish whatever guidance they may for the wise prosecution of the work.

The co-operation of our Aid Societies in extending information concerning the various agencies of the Commission for the relief and aid of discharged soldiers and their families will constitute another important service which they may render.

Some of these agencies are of a character which will not terminate with the disbanding of our armies, but will find their largest field of activity and usefulness during the year succeeding the close of the war.

The Commission is rapidly extending its system of Claim Agencies to all the principal cities and centers of population throughout the country. Through these agencies all claims of soldiers or sailors and their families are adjusted with the least possible delay and without charge, thus securing to the applicants the full amount of the claim as allowed, and exemption from the heavy tax, and often gross imposition and fraud, to which they are subjected by the ordinary methods. The evils to which the discharged soldier is exposed in the adjustment of claims against the Government are of so grave a nature that no effort should be spared to secure to him the benefits of this agency of the Commission's work. Regarding the Local Aid Societies as the natural guardians of the soldiers and the supervisors of the work of the Commission in their respective towns or cities, it is desired that they will exercise a careful superintendence of this work, promoting by every practicable means its efficiency, and making sure that every returned soldier in their vicinity and the family of every deceased soldier is actually informed of the aid gratuitously offered them by this agency of the Commission.

The maintenance of the organization of our Aid Societies will preserve to the Sanitary Commission the means of communicating with the people, from time to time, upon such topics as concern the continued welfare of returned soldiers, and especially in regard to the more permanent provision which it will be necessary to make for disabled soldiers, incapable of self-support. It is the profound conviction of the Sanitary Commission, that the peculiar genius and beauty of American institutions is to show itself in the power which the ordinary civil, social, and domestic life of the nation exhibits to absorb rapidly into itself our vast army, and restore to ordinary occupations those who have been fighting our battles; while the sick and the wounded are distributed through the country, objects of love, care, and restoration, in the several communities where they belong, instead of being collected in great State and national asylums, objects of public ostentation, and subjected to the routine, the isolation, and the ennui of an exceptional, unfruitful, and unhappy existence. Public provision of this latter kind, as free from its evil as may be, must be made for a certain small class of the friendless and the totally disabled; but humanity and American feeling demand that this class should be reduced to the smallest possible number through the zeal and friendliness shown towards our returning invalid soldiers in the towns from which they originally came. The Sanitary Commission will soon lay before its Branches and the public plans for such asylums for disabled and discharged soldiers as it may be necessary to establish.

Reserving the expression of our gratitude to our Branches and Soldiers' Aid Societies to a later period, we remain in behalf of the Board,

Yours, faithfully and truly,

H. W. BELLOWS,  
*President.*

JNO. S. BLATCHFORD,  
*General Secretary.*



